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SUBJECT: USAID/OFDA VISIT TO KENYA'S KAJIADO DISTRICT.

Summary

¶11. Three weeks of consistent rainfall has replenished pasture and natural water points in the Mashuru Division of Kenya's Kajiado District. The start of the long rains season should halt the decline in livestock numbers caused by recent dry conditions. Farmers have extensively planted crops and plants appear to be robust. Normal rains are essential for the area to stabilize and recover from eight previous months of drought conditions. Despite short-term improvements, underdevelopment will continue to leave populations vulnerable to future weather abnormalities. End summary.

Introduction

¶12. On April 5, USAID/OFDA Regional Advisor and Information Officer traveled to the Mashuru Division of Kenya's Kajiado District, which lies 160 kilometers southeast of Nairobi. The division, populated primarily by the Massai pastoralists, was highlighted as most affected in the Short Rains Assessment, a joint United Nations (U.N.) and Government of Kenya (GOK) post rainy season humanitarian assessment conducted in mid-February. Subsequently, 45 percent of the division's population is targeted for food assistance. USAID/OFDA visited several areas within the division accompanied by the non-governmental organization (NGO) Christian Children's Fund (CCF) and local government officials.

Finally, Some Rain

¶13. Consistent rainfall has occurred in Kajiado District for the last three weeks and marks the beginning of the scheduled long rains. According to Meteostat satellite imagery from the USAID-supported Famine Early Warning System Network (FEWS NET), more than 124 mm of rain fell between March 26 and April 1. The countryside is green; natural water points, such as earth dams and streams, are full; and new grass is abundant for livestock.

¶14. Farmers have already planted corn, vegetables, and beans for the season and plants appeared to be robust. There was no mention of a lack of seeds for this planting season. An abundance of fresh vegetables and cereals are for sale in Emali town, the division center, and traders report that prices have returned to normal levels after a spike in prices during the dry season.

¶15. Eight previous months of dry conditions had negatively impacted local livestock numbers. A Ministry of Livestock survey conducted in March found that 60 percent of area cattle had been lost, but that goat and sheep populations remained intact. During the visit, USAID/OFDA saw a few animal carcasses in the division and several herds of cattle and sheep grazing.

¶16. CCF has been working with local communities in the division since 2000 and is currently responding to local emergency needs. Emergency activities include feeding programs for 2,600 preschool children, meals for families affected with HIV/AIDS, immunization campaigns, and distribution of water tanks. Two new boreholes are being drilled in the division with private CCF funding. The local government admits it is cash poor with respect to humanitarian resources; however, it is assisting international efforts with targeting, community mobilization, and transparent oversight of community projects.

¶17. The U.N. World Food Program (WFP) and the GOK are distributing general food rations to approximately 45 percent of the division's population. Primary schools are participating in WFP's school feeding activity and

this was confirmed during the visit to the Enetaretoi School. Common complaints are that only the most vulnerable people in the division receive rations but that everybody needs food. The Short Rains Assessment reported that nutritional levels in the area were normal, and CCF believes that recent severe cases of malnutrition are related to the area's high HIV/AIDS prevalence. Severe malnourishment cases are treated in the Kajiado District Hospital.

¶18. The return of the rains may have come too late for as much as 30 percent of the population who have already lost all of their animals and livelihood opportunities to the recent drought conditions. The Division Administrator reported that a third of the students at the schools are unable to pay any fees for education and that their families are dependent on WFP/GOK assistance for survival. The charitable nature of the Massai culture to lend animals and food to families with nothing was described as the local solution to the problem of those without means. However, the severe conditions over the last eight months have impacted everyone and could prohibit the amount of local charity available.

¶19. Underdevelopment and HIV/AIDS, as well as the recent dry conditions, continue to inhibit development progress in Kajiado District. Local communities and schools reported they have several plans to improve access to water, provide electricity, and mitigate future drought conditions; however, little has actually materialized. While residents blame the recent drought for the failure of progress, it is clear that the local economic base is insufficient to support planning and local groups are uninformed as to how to realistically achieve such goals. Residents complain that the area receives little support from government for infrastructure development, health care or school improvements.

Conclusion

¶10. The arrival of the long rains should halt the decline in local livestock populations and has gotten agricultural production off to good start. Continuation of rainfall this season will be critical for the recovery process.

¶11. USAID currently provides humanitarian support to vulnerable communities in Kajiado District through contributions to the U.N. World Food Program (WFP) for general food distributions, and the U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF) for immunization and health programming.

¶12. Although no life threatening conditions were found in the division, and an immediate USAID/OFDA response is not necessary, some pastoralist families are now dependent upon the existing humanitarian assistance structure and local charity for survival. Although food security should improve with continued rain, access by the most affected could be limited. USAID/OFDA should consider recovery programming including animal restocking and mitigation activities, such as water harvesting, following the current rainy season.

¶13. Government investment and community mobilization is needed in the division to break the cycle of drought for pastoral communities. Introduction of livelihood diversification, improved infrastructure, and livestock marketing opportunities to smooth income variations would ease the affects of future dry periods and improve the general level of development. USAID/OFDA will continue to monitor conditions in Kajiado District.

BELLAMY.